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ABSTRACT

At Metropolitan State University, St. Paul, Minnesota, individualized undergraduate programs are designed by the students. Educational objectives are stated in terms of competencies achieved through life and work experiences, or during enrollment at the university. Two issues were central to this study: (1) the criteria to be used in judging the success of the university's students and its programs, and (2) those characteristics of students and programs which correlate with success. The resulting information may be used for student counseling, remedial aid, and program improvement. The results indicated that those Metropolitan University students who successfully completed degree programs shared many of the same characteristics of graduates of traditional programs. Those students tended to be over 30 years of age, women, married, white, have yearly incomes over $15,000, work less than 35 hours per week, have resolved conflicts between their studies and employment, have transferred from another four-year college, have entered with more earned college credits, have a good self concept, and be motivated by personal rather than external pressures. Characteristics of successful programs include: presence of work experience opportunities, satisfactory guidance and support services, flexible curricula, good philosophy toward structure and record-keeping, and maintenance of student interest. (GDC)

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Explorations of Correlates of Success at Metropolitan State University

Metropolitan State University is an upper-level under-graduate institution founded in 1971 and offering the B.A. degree. It is one of the seven institutions in the Minnesota State University system and has been specifically designated as an experimental unit of the system. At Metro U, each student design his or her own degree program and there are no specific requirements for graduation. All degree programs are set forth in terms of competences achieved through life/work experiences and/or competences to be achieved while enrolled at the University. Individual degree plans may be composed entirely of competences gained prior to enrollment or entirely of competences to be gained while enrolled. However, most students design degree programs with a combination of competences gained prior to enrollment and to be verified by the University plus competences to be achieved while enrolled. Nearly all of the learning activities (courses, independent study units, internships) sponsored by the University are community-based, i.e., are taught by part-time adjunt or community faculty persons in community facilities (public buildings, private businesses, church educational wings, and space provided by volunteer organizations). Since the program is competency-based, the full-time student enrollment is computed on the basis of the number of competences which students are able to verify during a given time-frame, rather than on the basis of the number of students who register for learning activities or prior learning assessment. These program characteristics are of significance in a discussion of appropriate criteria and correlates of success to be used in examining the Metro U program, and we will be returning to a fuller discussion of these features of the University in this paper.

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In exploring the correlates of success at Metro U we are essentially seeking answers to two basic sets of questions:

1. What criteria shall we use in judging the success of students at Metro U? What criteria shall we use in judging the success of the Metro U program and various components of that program?
2. What characteristics of students correlates with these criteria of success? What program characteristics correlate with the criteria of success?

In seeking answers to these questions we have three basic objectives in mind:

1. To be able to appropriately advise students and prospective students.
2. To be able to offer appropriate special services to students likely to experience difficulties.
3. To identify and appropriately refine program characteristics that enhance or inhibit students' success.

To answer adequately these questions and achieve these objectives, we would need to create and implement a comprehensive research design using the criteria and correlates presented in the attached chart. We would be utilizing several criteria of success on the one hand and manipulating two basic sets of correlates to these criteria on the other hand. The two basic sets of correlates are seen to be student and program characteristics. The first three criteria of success (IA, BC; II; III) are fairly well known because they are used as criteria in judging traditional post-secondary educational programs, except for criterion I.C. (the percent of graduates implementing the life-long learning concepts after graduation). At Metro U one of our stated program objectives is to instill in our graduates a dedication to the concepts of life-long, self-directed learning. So, we are interested in the percentage of our graduates who engage in formal and informal learning activities after graduation. It follows, also, that we want to know about the types of students who continue to

engage in formal learning after graduation as well as the program characteristics at Metro U which seem to enhance or inhibit the likelihood of such behavior after graduation.

Criterion number IV is really two very closely related criteria. It is of interest to us to examine both the percentage of our students who complete preparation of a degree plan and the percentage of enrollees who actually complete the implementation of a degree plan, thereby allowing them to graduate. Again, we would like information concerning the types of students that show high and low rates of completion as well as the program characteristics which intend to enhance or inhibit the likelihood of such completions.

We have an interest in criterion V because our student FTE, and thus our legislative appropriation, is based on the rate at wnich students acquire and/or verify competences in their degree plans. Here again, we are dealing with two criteria that are closely related: how quickly students prepare degree plans and how quickly they acquire and/or verify the competences contained in those degree plans. We need to identify the types of students who move quickly through this process versus those who move slowly. We are interested in examining the program characteristics which tend to inhibit or enhance the rate at which students are able to move through the process.

Criteria VI and VII do not lend themselves to easy quantification. They are, however, important criteria to us. We are interested in the types of students who produce quality degree plans as well as identifying those who easily acquire the effective use of community resources. We also need to know about program characteristics which tend to assist or inhibit students in the attempts to succeed in these two areas. And finally, like traditional programs, we want all components of the our program to be cost effective.

The student characteristics listed on the chart are those commonly examined in traditional programs and probably need no further explanation here.

The program characteristics selected are those that are both non-traditional in nature and which we would anticipate would be significant in enhancing or inhibiting the success of students in relationship to the criteria of success. We briefly described these characteristics at the beginning of this paper, but it may be useful to present here some of our findings relative to one of these characteristics to further illustrate their significance.

Let us look at the first program characteristic (the way in which students design an individualized degree program). In the early days of the University, degree plans were developed by students working on an individual basis with advisors. It was found, however, that this was a costly, time-consuming process which involved a considerable amount of the advisor's time, and students were taking an average of six months simply to plan their degree programs. In January, 1974, it was decided that the degree program planning function was to be achieved by the establishment of a course in individualized educational planning. Through this course, we have been able to reduce the amount of average time taken by students to complete the formulation of degree plans from six months to six weeks. We are finding a higher degree of satisfaction with the degree planning process being expressed by students, graduates and drop-outs as well as faculty and staff.

The percent of enrollees who complete the preparation of a degree plan has increased. It is also the opinion of the faculty and staff that the quality of the content of the degree plans has improved through this program. All of these results can be traced directly to the establishment of this course.

In addition, we think we have reason to believe that two other things have resulted, at least in part, from the introduction of the course. The percent of

enrollees who graduate has increased. The rate of acquisition and/or verification of competence has gone up.

We do not, at this time, have much data, that would allow us to judge the impact of the Individualized Educational Planning Course on the success of our graduates or on the ability of our students to use community resources.

It is our impression, however, that students have a better understanding of competency-based education and the use of community-based learning resources.
To further illustrate the use of this research model, let us take one of the criteria of success and explore some of the student and program correlates related to it. Using the criterion of success number IV, percent of enrollees who graduate, let us look at some of the student and program characteristics which seem to correlate with this particular criterion of success. When comparing our graduates with the entire student enrollment at Metro U, we find our higher rates of completion among:

1. Those over 30 years of age.
2. Women.
3. Married students.
4. Whites.
5. Those with incomes over $15,000 per year.
6. Those who work less than 35 hours per week.
7. Those who have been able to resolve conflicts between employment and studies.
8. Those who transferred from another four-year institution (in contrast to those who attended a community college).
9. Those with the larger amounts of college credit at the time of entrance.
10. Those who have a good self-concept relative to traits of leadership, persistence, drive to achieve and self-motivation.
11. Those who are motivated more by personal desire than by external pressures to finish college.

There are a couple of student characteristics which do not show up in the literature relative to the correlates of success in traditional programs that are of interest in examining non-traditional programs. Those students who perceive the opportunity to receive credit for life/work experience as being important have a higher rate of completion than those for whom this opportunity is less important. Those who perceive the chance to obtain a degree quickly as being an important reason for selecting Metro U have a higher rate of completion than those for whom this is not an important consideration.

Thus, we can see that generally those students who show a high rate of degree completion at Metro U exhibit many of the same characteristics as those who show a high rate of completion in traditional programs. But, what we don't know is whether or not those who show a low rate of completion in traditional programs have a higher rate of degree completion at Metro U than they would have had in a more traditional program. Some preliminary indications do support the thesis that those students whose characteristics would lead us to predict a low rate of completion in traditional programs have found a higher rate of degree completion at Metro U. We are in need, however, of a great deal of future research to answer the crucial question as to whether or not low-success students succeed better in a non-traditional program than they would have in a traditional one. What needs to be asked and answered is the question as to whether or not young adult males, racial minorities, persons of low income, those who find it necessary to work full-time while attending college, adults with little or no previous college experience, adults who are single, widowed or divorced and those with poor self-concepts, succeed better in non-traditional programs than in traditional settings. Our preliminary, but inconclusive evidence indicates that all of this is true.

Finally, let us look as some of the program characteristics which seem to enhance the chances of the completion of a degree program. Higher rates of

completion are found among students who:

1. participate in internships and other community-based learning experiences.
2. are satisfied with their advisor and the academic counseling services.
3. perceive flexibility in the curriculum and in the degree of independence available in selecting studies.
4. feel that the support services (book purchasing, library access, vocational counseling, peer contact, sense of identity with the University) are adequate.
5. find their studies interesting. (It is significant, however, that no difference is found among graduates, active or inactive students concerning the perceived difficulty or quality of studies.)
6. interpret the lack of structure and requirements as not meaning a lack of excellence.
7. have high tolerance for the cumbersome and complicated record-keeping of a non-traditional program.

In closing, we should note that we have been trying to identify criteria and correlates of success that seem appropriate for making judgments about one non-traditional post-secondary educational institution - Metropolitan State University. You will note that some of the usual success criteria are absent. Perhaps some of our future research should center around such success criteria as grades obtained in courses taken after graduation from Metro U and test scores on standardized examinations. Given the individualized nature of degree programs at Metro U, these criteria have not,to date, seemed particularly appropriate. The areas institutional criteria of success listed by Dave Forman in his paper are important, but we have not been able to define these in such a way as to make them measurable. Much more needs to be done with these areas.

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Explorations of Correlates of Success at Metropolitan State University

Criteria of Success	Correlates of Success	
	Student Characteristics	Program Characteristics
I. Success of graduates A. % of applicants to graduate and professional school who are admitted. B. % whose employment circumstances improved soon after graduation. C. % implementing life-long learning concept after graduation.	I. Age	I. Designing an individualized degree program.
II. Satisfaction expressed by students, graduates and drop-outs.	II. Sex	II. Use of community resources in implementing a degree plan. A. community faculty B. facilities C. learning activities 1. courses 2. independent study 3. internships
III. Satisfaction expressed by administrators, permanent and community faculty; also opinions expressed as to the types of students who are succeeding versus those not doing well.	III. Marital status	III. Advising during degree plan implementation.
IV. % of enrollees who graduate; % who complete the preparation of a degree plan.	IV. Race	IV. Assessment of experiential learning. A. assessment policies B. narrative transcript
V. Rate of acquisition and/or verification of competences; rate of completion of preparation of degree plan.	V. Family income	V. Support service.
VI. Quality of degree plan(s).	VI. Employment situation	
VII. Effective use of community resources during degree plan implementations.	VII. Previous educational experience	
VIII. Cost effectiveness.	VIII. Academic ability	
	IX. Previous life/work experience	
	X. Self-concept	
	XI. Motivations for selecting a non-traditional program	
	XII. Area of subject matter concentration	

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